

Things aren't always what they seem

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Summary: Admiral Jenn Torvan receives new orders and upgrades to her ship. But the already doubting admiral only finds more doubts and hesitation on her route when she learns what those upgrades are. In the meantime, Jorel Quinn learns something about one of his admirals from the one person he could definitely do without..

1. Chapter 1

Things aren't always what they seem.

"W_hy do I keep feeling like I don't belong here?_" It was a simple question but yet, there were so many roads to travel in my search for the answer. And, I was definitely the last person to ask that question. After all, It wouldn't do for a Starfleet admiral to doubt herself when the going got interesting.

Then again, my meteoric rise to admiral was an interesting thing all in its self.

I was aboard Earth Spacedock, leaning on the rail that bordered on the stairs that lead to the office of CINC Starfleet, Admiral Jorel Quinn. I was watching beings of nearly all shapes and sizes in Starfleet uniforms walking to and from, busy with all sorts of regular things you would expect at a place like this. And yet, they too looked out of place to me. For some odd reason I actually expected them to cower in front of me or at least try to avoid being the center of my attentionâ€!

The fact that those beings weren't cowering in front of me annoyed me, but it didn't annoy me as much as the fact that we had had to bring the USS Huallaga back to spacedock for repairs after yet another encounter with a Borg incursion. This little stop over prevented me from getting back out there, and I didn't really like having to visit Admiral Quinn either.

My comm badge chirped. "The Admiral will see you now."

I banished the thoughts about cowering space station staff to the farthest and deepest reaches of my mind and headed through the entrance that would bring me to the Admiral's office. I didn't catch the security guards coming to attention nor did I hear the clattering of the small waterfall that ran off his office back wall. Like a borg drone I headed left on autopilot and practically ignored everybody else that was seemingly occupied by the daily operations that Starfleet conducted through this office.

I also spotted Ambassador Sugihara. He was outside of Quinn's office and already in deep conversation with a couple of captains and somebody I recognized as the Deferi ambassador. I actually pitied the guy, the Deferi still had a lot of troubles with the Breen and yet Starfleet was slowly but surely getting a grip on things in the Orelius sector, I thought we could do more. It didn't help all that much either that the joint alliance of the Federation, Klingon and Romulan Republic forces had failed to prevent the Iconians from destroying the Preserver archive on Lae'nas III.

Quinn's own office had only one occupant. The man himself. There was a small stack of pads on his desk, and the admiral was alternating between studying the pad and looking at something on his terminal. For a brief moment, I thought I noticed a flash of worry appear on his features but, those worried features disappeared just as soon as he noticed me.

The door hushed shut behind me. It made me feel more than a little trapped.

"Good to see you Jenn, please take a seat."

I sat down on the left seat, wondering why he wanted to see me.

"Tell me, how is the Sojourner class doing?"

I gave him some details on my last run in with the Borg and how the ship performed. Then I added a few things which had come up in the after action reports from the command crew. Admiral Quinn then nodded and made a few cursory notes on the pad he had been holding. He then picked up another padd from the stack and handed it to me, with a question "I take it you remember the Mirror universe?"

Unwillingly I shivered "The Mirror universe are literally our polar opposites, in everything. Where we seek peaceful cooperation, they conquer.." I didn't finish the rest as I noticed Quinn had raised a hand

"Yes, I know all that. We've had a few skirmishes with Mirror universe forces in the Badlands recently, and as a result of that we've gained a few more samples of their technology. Technology we can adapt to our use."

A brief flash of an earlier encounter rushed through my head, it was a ship that had looked like the Galaxy class I had been commanding then, only it was a lot more powerful, and had proceeded for a while to kick the living crap out of my ship before we turned things around and destroyed the Mirror Galaxy classâ€|.

While I had the flashback on my own little mirror incursion I missed the rest of the Admiral's explanation. I only caught "Therefore your ship will receive a couple of weapon upgrades in the form of Mirror Universe phasers."

The chill that I had felt running down my spine now turned into a freeze. Where they really equipping the Huallaga with Mirror Universe weaponry? I reached over to receive a padd from the admiral. A quick glance showed them to be weapon specifics and other assorted technical details. Next up was a data package that included orders and a patrol route

I glanced up from my reading. "Orellius sector, sir?"

"Correct. With things in the Delta quadrant stabilizing and the Iconian situation resolved we can afford to shift our focus elsewhere for now."

I nodded my understanding. "Then in that case, by your leave sir?"

A nod from the admiral and the door hissing open meant I was on my way back to my ship, not feeling relieved at all. I didn't even notice the Admiral staring at me as I left his office.

The beeping of the padd on top of the stack caught Admiral Quinn's attention just as soon as Admiral Jenn Torvan had left his visual range. He activated the padd and almost wished he hadn't.

"Drake..." Quinn didn't really feel like talking to the operative.

"Admiral Quinn..what if I told you Admiral Jenn Torvan is more then a little skeptical about her assignment to the Orellius sector block?"

"And why is that, Drake? Because of something you guysâ€|. "

Quinn never finished the sentence. There was something in Drake's attitude that made him stop.

"Only quite recently we've become aware of somethingâ€|..."

to be continued.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

I had a conference call scheduled for the senior staff once we were underway and 2 hours from Earth. It would mostly consist of strategic talk and correlating intelligence on several levels. And then there were the study requests...Most of these consisted of 'look at stellar phenomena/planetary body at x and y and describe why it is special and what is so special about it.' type requests Sometimes these were interesting, especially when you were dealing with stuff that led to more archeological type investigations, but in general I left most of the science stuff to the science department.

I considered myself shocked when I found a small mix of tactical and

engineering study requests at the bottom of the list. Oh, don't get me wrong, I wasn't shocked that the study requests were there, I had fully expected them to be there. I was shocked about _what_ they were asking us to research, and I was pretty certain the command crew would have a few doubts about _this_ study request as well.

"C_ome to a working solution with regards to the implementation and adaptation of older technology slug throwers and assorted tactics in relation to small units." I whispered the last phrase of the request to myself..I started wondering who had come up with that idea and had worded it like that as well.

My thoughts were interrupted by the door to conference room opening. My command staff was arriving. Fortunately they all arrived together, saving me the hassle of having to salute them one by one as they came in.

I also caught a few bits and pieces of a rather animated conversation that had been going between the chief of Security who was Bolian and the Executive officer, who was from Andoria.

"It's semantics Begeroh. A game is not a simulation like we use for training. A game like that tactical game you were playing is more intended as a way to make the brain think of something else then the daily grind. A true simulation would have _a lot_ more demands and requirements on it."

I managed to suppress a chuckle as Begeroh seemed to have more then a little trouble resisting the urge to face palm. "That isn't what I meant. What I meant is that these so called entertainment games are light simulations, meant to entice people to think outside the box, just like we do."

Takerra gave a shrug "So?"

"In times like these we really need to do what the humans call 'thinking outside the box' It's not easy for some species, whereas some like the pinkskins do it almost naturally. If this stuff can help me do my work better.." Begeroh answered.

Takerra didn't answer. Instead she took the seat to my left and start to skim over the padd that contained the mission details and study requests. I noticed a slight raising of her left eyebrow, not unlike a certain famous Vulcan science officer would have done. Somewhat further down the row of seats I heard a chuckle. Begeroh seemed to be a shoe in to both lead and conduct _that_ study.

Denam Tahr was the other Andorian on the staff. He shared that duty with Kenahov, one of the many Klingons that had elected to serve in Starfleet instead of the KDF. Kenahov was a bit more withdrawn, through sheer misfortune he had faced his fellow Klingons during the war. His file jacket mentioned that he had received counseling and seemed to thrive when switched to an engineering track. The change seemed to suit him. And yet, there was something indescribable inside that Klingon that waited to be let out. I hoped I wasn't going to be around when that certain something went off.

From the far end of the room, Ozloe came in. An unjoined Betazed, She held both the posts of ships doctor and Chief Science officer. Ozloe was another of those quiet types who would quickly study available

data before finding appropriate theories and reporting on those when asked. Ozloe and I got along well, but the difference in me not having science training was telling at times.

I glanced around the conference room briefly. They were all present. "Since everybody is here, might I suggest we start?" Their respective eyes were soon focused on me. "We have a lot of stuff to discuss."

I could only hope that the meeting wouldn't last as long as the one we had held before we went into the Delta quadrant. And that studyâ€|. I had already figured that both Takerra and Begeroh would be part of that study on slug throwers and small unit tactics. It remained to be seen how the two of them would react to me being the overseer...

In the meantime, in the Badlands...

"Transition complete." As both the helm and science stations confirmed we were through safely the breath that I was holding escaped my lungs. We were through the dimensional transporter unharmed and undamaged, ready for a certain mission, and a lot of trouble that was certain to come our way. I looked in the direction of the master tactical display and the Lieutenant-Commander behind it "Anything?"

I heard his fingers race across the keyboard while I watched him looking at some of his own other displays. Not that much later he was ready. "Nothing. Unless there are cloaked ships out there that are watching us now..." I finished the thought for him "And if they have spotted us they would be all over us."

I looked at the helm "Helm, plot a course out of here for the Orellius sector block, half impulse. Sensors, keep an eye out. As soon as you see anything, call it out!" I sat back down in the center seat. Outside in space, the impulse thrusters on the Avenger class battlecruiser flared briefly before she disappeared into the maelstrom of plasma storms and the Orellius sector beyond it where she would cloak until it was time...

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Deep Space 9,

To call station Deep Space 9 not busy was a massive understatement. When the Huallaga came out of warp we could see that every one of the big three powers had one or more ships at the station where they were either docked or parked in a holding pattern nearby. I had seen the wormhole open up before as well, during that little...'problem' we had with the Jem Hadar fleet that showed up 40 years too late.

I was amazed to see 2 Romulan Republic Scimitar subtype Dreadnoughts as well. To me it was an indication the Republic noticed that the Deferi could still use help, but I did wonder as well whether or not those 2 big ships were a bit of overkill. Although Starfleet Intelligence suspected there were Breen Dreadnoughts in the sector nobody had ever actually seen them on sensors or otherwise. The heaviest ships the Breen had deployed up until now were their Chell

Grett Cruisers, and most of those had either been chased off or destroyed outright once Federation or other Alliance forces arrived on the scene.

Still, I was sure that most of the reports that I had seen on the area didn't have the answer to one question. Why were the Breen still persisting in their efforts to subjugate the Deferi? I supposed that nobody really knew or understood why yet. Although the odds weren't in my favor, I was hoping the data package that captain Kurland would give me, would allow me in turn to fill in some of the intelligence gaps I still had.

Station ops appeared to have been waiting for us. They reported that due to the traffic around the station they couldn't provide us with a docking slot. The coordinates that had been attached to the message would have me beaming in on the Promenade, a hell of a way to attract attention when I wanted to avoid that instead.

The beam in was nothing special. I materialized near an airlock that wasn't in use and with a few leaps I was in the elevator, on my way to ops.

Ops was the nerve center of Ds9. From here, Sisko had first encountered the Jem Hadar and faced down the Klingons when they invaded Cardassia. It was here also that the Dominion war began and ended with the treaty of Bajor. Ops nowadays wasn't very busy. I noticed only two officers in the far corner, apparently handling traffic control while Kurland himself was standing near the Master Strategy Display Table or 'the bathtub' as some had begun to call it, seemingly deep in thought.

He had aged a bit more since the last time I had seen him, and, the worry across his features was a bit more evident as well. He glanced up at the direction of the elevator not recognizing me the first time as his face went back to studying the display before it clicked that I had arrived and he glanced up again, this time with a smile.

"Hello Admiral, good to see you again."

It didn't bother me that he didn't salute. We were Starfleet, and not any kind of imperial Navy or anything else comparable. I took his offered hand and shook it. "Good to see you again as well, Captain. I hope things on the station are well?"

Kurland nodded "As well as can be, considering the volume of traffic, and the engineering overhaul this place is going to need somewhere in the near future." He then proceeded to give me the full rundown on what was still wrong with the station and what was going to be needed to fix it. I had to stop his little rant a few moments later.

"I'm sorry captain, but I'm not here to conduct an engineering survey of the station. I'm here for something else entirely."

The remark brought Kurland back to where I needed him. "Ah yes, that. Please follow me." We went up another flight of stairs and entered the captain's office. The captain motioned for me to wait while he opened a case. Only then did he hand me another padd. It was the data package I was supposed to received

I began to read the attached intelligence file immediately. About a quarter of the way in I noticed I knew most of the stuff in the report already. When I got to the halfway point, which was about 20 minutes later I realized not much had changed. I kept on reading to see whether or not I was right.

Then I found something I didn't know about. The paragraph was titled 'Mirror Universe incursions'."

"_The mirror Universe imperial forces continue to use the power of the plasma storms in the Badlands to attempt and gain a foothold on this side of the universe. They have been unsuccessful in all of their attempts, but at great cost to all of the involved Alliance forces. Attempts to set up a surveillance network are interesting, but also a waste of time. The influence and effects of the plasma storms and spatial currents they generate are such that the Mirror universe imperial forces could gain a foothold and sneak a substantial fleet in. Should this occur the Federation and with it the Alliance would be in even deeper trouble then with the return of the 40 year old Jem'Hadar fleet._

Unfortunately problems for the respective fleets do not stop there.

The Mirror Universe Empire is still in possession of the Dimensional Transporter Technology. With this, they can and will move into our universe. While it will not be in fleet strength, great care must be taken anyway. It isn't hard to imagine a single ship slipping through while alerted forces are fighting off a bigger intrusion. Any single Imperial ship that does get out of the Badlands, has the potential of becoming a commerce raider or worse, which will necessitate deploying forces to either cover vital installations or escort convoys, or hunt down and destroy those ships that do make it through."

I skimmed through the rest of the file which contained known positions of Breen ships near Defera and the surrounding systems and a few recommendations on how to fight them. I quickly touched a few buttons on the pad, sending the file to the ship via thumb print approval.

Then I looked at James Kurland, who was now sitting behind his desk, clearly thinking about something else entirely. And yet again, I could read the worry of his face. "Is there anything else I should be concerned about?"

The old captain's head shook no "I'm worried. I figured that with the Iconian problem over we would start to look out again. But that.." He paused, as if he was looking for a word "that thing with the Na'kuhl.." He trailed off.

I knew what he meant anyway. The 'First contact' failure we had with the Na'kuhl was going to have some very interesting repercussions within Starfleet itself as well, but that wasn't my problem right now. My problem was avoiding the upcoming debate and getting underway.

My left hand raised I signalled Kurland that I wanted him to stop talking. "James, I believe this is a debate we will have to have with each other on more than one level. But not right now. Right now I have something else on my mind."

A meek "Sorry." came on reply, by then I was already out of his office and heading for the elevator.

Not ten minutes later I was back aboard my ship and our course out of the pattern towards our first destination, Defera was set.

Back on DS9, 20 minutes after the departure of USS Huallaga._

"Captain Kurland to the strategic operations desk." Kurland frowned as the request for his presence at the desk of Lieutenant-Commander Arix was repeated. If Mesi Achebe, his current XO had run into troubleâ€| the station was a designated fallback point incase of heavy trouble.

He was at the Ferengi her station not much later. "Report."

Without looking up the Ferengi female gave her report "Sir, one of the satellites that is monitoring the plasma storms in the Badlands transmitted this image that I'm bringing up on the main screen...now."

The main screen in ops flashed on, and there, prominently on display was the stern image of an Avenger class Battlecruiser, heading out of the Badlands.

"Why did you call me out here, Arix?" James Kurland sounded a little agitated. He still had a lot to do according to the duty schedule.

"Sir, after crosschecking with commander Achebe it turns out that the task force isn't missing any Avenger class ship. Nor do we have any Avenger class ships out on patrol or on other duties out that way. That ship isn't one of ours, and sir, she's was vectoring for Deferaâ€|."

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

When we were about halfway to Defera, I received a call from Denam to come to holodeck 2. The Andorian chief engineer met me outside the deck. "We're ready, sir. It was an interesting challenge to say the least. You humans had such a variety of weapons of war throughout your history."

I suppressed a laugh. "Not enough of a challenge, commander?"

"No sir, not at all. I'm just a little surprised by everything that was apparently possible with those old weapons." He then motioned in the direction of the door. "Shall we."

I nodded "Lead on."

When I entered the holodeck, I walked on to a pasture which wouldn't have looked out of place nearly anywhere in the northern hemisphere on Earth. A brief look at the sky told me that it was somewhere in the summer. Up in the distance a number of tables had been placed in

a rectangular formation for ease of access and viewing. I could also see a number of objects on the tables. A short distance away and directly opposite was a wooden fence. Some distance away I noticed a bunch of dolls, resembling a cross section of the Federation enemies. Even the Breen had made it in.

"Not a bad setup, for a demonstration. Now let's see what you really have for me, Denam." the Andorian produced a smile that showed he wasn't only proud, he was really looking forward to what was going to happen here.

I noticed that the rest of the command crew was already studying what had been put out for display on the tables in front of them. In some cases, something that was on display was taken in hand and aimed at the sky or at one of the dolls. There was also a marked difference between what was on the tables. At the furthest end, were heavier weapons like machine guns. Next to that several types of rifles and a rifle looking type of weapon that I didn't immediately recognize were on display. The final two tables carried pistols, and something I had seen before, on a historical recording.

Kenahov noticed my stare "Admiral?"

"Is that..?" the object itself was clearly a weapon, but it wasn't like the others on display, for it had an older appearance to it. It had a stock like a rifle and a long barrel that had a pistol like grip fitted under it. A second pistol like grip encompassed the trigger. The weapon itself was laying on its side and a couple of drum shaped magazines were right next to it.

"Number one wasn't able to resist sir. Takerra pulled this straight out of a number of holonovel classics."

I did not quite succeed in suppressing a chuckle. "I take it the rest are early 21st century?"

The burly Klingon nodded. "Indeed they are. You humans and your wars..."

"I know. We've had a few too many people thinking they could be Kahless the unforgettable. They weren't, and people paid with their lives as a result." I sighed. "Sorry, didn't mean to..."

This time, Kenahov laughed. It was one of his famous belly laughs he used when he was genuinely entertained."No worries admiral. You're an honorable woman and I am honored to stand at your side in these... troublesome times."I felt happy to have a crew like that. It made some of the stuff I faced before somewhat more bearable. It also made me put more effort into inspecting the weapon designs the engineers and tactical guys had come up with. I felt that I wasn't going to be disappointed. The next table I got to had a number of pistols arranged on it. Several models were out on display. And this time I was certain Denam and Takerra had cooperated. Because to me it looked like they had selected a bunch of pistols that could be adapted to certain situations.

I glanced over at Takerra, who seemed to be lusting over an assault rifle type that I didn't recognize. She looked back and in her eyes I could see the confirmation. Modification was exactly what she had in mind, and it wasn't just for the pistols. From the look I received in

reply I was already convinced my number one wanted to modify all the weapons we were going to select.

As I looked around again, I finally noticed we were missing someone.
"Where is the doctor?"

"The doctor is preparing a medical lecture, apparently it has been a long time since anyone has seen slug thrower wounds." Ah yes, the other side of the scale had to be prepared for as well. I did make a mental note that I was going to have to tell Ozloe all of her field medics were going to have to take the course we were going to establish as well.

I joined Takerra at the machine gun table. "Nice selection."

"Thank you, sir. Based on the specifications in the study request we'll work out a few tactics and a training schedual. I take it you'll want both security and the assault team to cross train in this?"

"And the field medics. I want all of us to have a better chance next time we're down on a planet and the enemy is blocking our energy stuff."

A very thin and very creepy smile now appeared on the Andorian her face. "I do believe I can arrange that." I didn't bother asking any more. Takerra and Denham had things well in hand. I would make my own choice with regards to what weapons I would use later, when the training program was about to start.

In the meantime, I had to prepare for a meeting. A meeting with an ambassador that I wasn't looking forward too, at all. You see, I was one of the people that was there when the Preserver archive on Lae'nas III was destroyed by the Iconians. I failed to prevent that from happening. And that failure, didn't sit well with me, because ultimately it meant the Iconian war got harder, to the point where we faced annihilation.

I barely managed to suppress the dark thoughts I had about those days. I really didn't want to go through another session with one of Ozloe her counselors either. I could do without that distraction.

There was nothing spectacular going on the bridge as I got back there, so I retreated to the ready room, grabbed a snack and a liquid refreshment from the replicator. Then I sat down to read. I was still reading when the bridge signaled we were pulling into standard orbit of the Deferi homeworld.

In contradiction what had been set up I beamed in at one of the pathways out of the city that led to the Preserver ruins that lay to the East. One of the ambassadors assistants had acknowledged a message from Takerra that I was going to be late and wanted to meet in a different location. The assistant had agreed to the request, especially when Takerra impressed upon the assistant that I required an area where we would not be disturbed.

It was ambassador Surah himself and he was but 5 minutes late, and when he saw me, he hesitated, as if something had 'unbalanced' him. I walked forward to meet him, but as I got closer, he fell back. What

had happened to this Deferi to cause this?

"Please admiral, no further." I was glad surah finally spoke and just like he asked I held my step.

"Ambassador?"

"This imbalance...this is not possible!"

"Ambassador?" I could see he was distressed about something, or in this case someone, and that someone, was me! But why?

"Ambassador Surah, please explain to me. What is happening? Why am I causing this imbalance?"

By now Surah had his hands buried in his head, as if he was trying and not succeeding in forcing something out of his head. "Why couldn't you have told this?" It almost sounded as if the ambassador was ready to start crying.

I repeated my question again "Please, ambassador, I haven't been to Defera in months due to the war. What happened?" I added a bit more insistence to my voice, as if I was correcting a junior officer's infraction. I was starting to get unhappy myself. I was not only being blamed for something I hadn't done, in the same turn I was also being blamed for something that I knew I would never do in sensitive situations such as these.

"You happened, Admiral." Surah finally answered me "You...you yourself stated that every thing would one day belong to the Federation, and that we as a species would be forced to accept such incomprehensible changes..the balance would be shattered. It is simply unthinkable! Why did you do this, Admiral Torvan?"

It was the beginning of pure unadulterated hatred, oozing in droves from that one question, to which I did not have an answer yet. Everything I had done in the presence of the ambassador was so diametrically opposite from what was taught at Starfleet Academy and the command courses.

Only then did I begin to feel the slow chill that was slowly finding its way down my spine. I then heard two things. The first was me activating my combadge. The second was a sentence.

"Admiral Torvan to Huallaga. We have a problem."

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Once I realized what had really happened on the planet I had myself beamed back to the Huallaga and gave the order to break orbit. I wanted a little distance between us and Defera while I figured out what needed to be done next. The Mirror universe had never really been this far out of the badlands before. Why were they all the way over here?

I was going to have to ask some very pointed questions to a few people on Deep Space 9. From there the efforts against the Mirror

Universe were coordinated, and it looked like they missed something important, which simply should not have happened.

I made the call to DS 9 from my ready room. Kurland took it immediately. "Hello Admiral. I take it you're calling about the Mirror universe problem at Defera?" I was close enough to see his eyes. Almost immediately I saw it, that slight minuscule twitch. As if he was nervous for some reason. Kurland's eyes were darting away, to the right. Not only did he know more about it than I did, but then and there I started to wonder if there was actually somebody in the office with him, keeping him under control.

"You knew?" I tried to sound somewhat astounded, hoping that whoever was in the office with him wouldn't notice. I noticed Kurland's eyes dart to the right again, as if he was reading from a script that had been placed on his terminal.

"We received the data about half an hour after your departure. After that we had a communications failure. We couldn't reach you in time to warn you." It seemed plausible. That 'little' Jem'Hadar invasion had done damage to DS9 her communications suite that the engineers hadn't quite been able to fix yet. I did recall though that I had never seen reports indicating specific outages on the station that were related to battle damage that would have received priority repairs anyway. So why was I being lied to?

"Right, so what about Ambassador Surah?" Again I noticed Kurland's eyes darting to the right.

"The ambassador will receive counseling. Ambassador Sugihara is more than willing to arrange that." Despite the answer bordering on the edge of a lie, I exhaled slowly. That was one problem solved. But there was one rather substantial problem still remaining. Why had the Empire been to Defera? What did they want there?

Kurland then spoke again "We've been in touch with Starfleet Command. They've asked us to relay new orders to you." The data light on the center seat console indicated that we were indeed receiving a data package.

"I take it our patrol has now changed to a search mission? And are there any reinforcements available?" Despite the Sojourner class having ample power, I felt that the ship's size constricted her maneuverability somewhat. There was also the fact that the Mirror Universe ships had a fair bit of firepower, matching that with a couple of extra escorts couldn't hurt in my opinion.

Kurland ignored my questions "It's all in the package. Kurland out!" The screen faded to black. The last part of the conversation and the rather quick termination of the connection told me more than I really wanted to know.

Despite her shift having ended ten minutes earlier, Takerra was still on the bridge. Like any number one, she had already extracted the necessary information and deployed it to a tactical hologram, which she then displayed on the plot screen that had been put up near the tactical station.

I found myself looking at a map of the Deferi sector itself, and this time a few systems up to the border with Breen space were marked as

places that needed to be searched as well. A brief glance across the map showed me a few other details that had me concerned.

The space near Raveh was the favorite hunting ground for Breen raiders preying on Deferi ships that were approaching the planet of the same name. It was the same with the Kelvani belt and the miners there, although the Kelvani belt, and some of the other outposts the Deferi had established, already had more Alliance patrols swinging by. In my mind the Kelvani belt suddenly became the last place I wanted to search. After all, if the Mirror empire was gathering intelligence on the place the last thing they wanted was to attract attention.

A couple of other systems in the sector had been marked as potentials, but a quick comparison with the fleet database and my own logs showed that earlier preliminary surveys had found nothing really interesting. The same could now be said about Lae'nas. Oddly the last planetary system on the list that we would have to search, was the Zaria system. Breen ships had been sighted in that system near one of the planets. They never stayed long. There were rumors about a mining operation, but nobody had ever been able to determine whether those rumors were just that.

"Where to start.." I mumbled.

"Sir?"

"Sorry commander, I forgot you were here. Us pink skins tend to get a little..strange when they need to think about some rather complicated problems." I half jokingly answered. Then I explained the new orders, and how our patrol had been turned into a search. Finally I told her what we were supposed to be looking for.

Takerra her antennae didn't even twitch. Instead I saw her blond like bushy brows frown in concentration as she began studying the map with the plotted. "There are a lot of places to hide in space and since it is vast...we will have to sort this out through other means."

"Such as?" I wondered what she was thinking. I still considered myself a little too shocked by what the Deferi Ambassador had told me. I knew other captains had encountered their Mirror doubles before. I just never expected it to happen to me.

"By figuring out what she is doing, not doing and, going to do_. " In my mind I heard the emphasis on 'going to do.'

"Elaborate." I suspected I knew what she was thinking but I needed to hear what she had to say so I could see it on the map.

"As we're currently the only ones aware of the Mirror vessel, we are going to have to eliminate where she will be going and what she will not do." Takerra began. I barely resisted the urge to roll my eyes."She isn't engaged in any kind of commerce raiding yet, or else we or any other friendly ships in the area would be getting distress calls like we do when the Breen are busy. She and her commander haven't been sighted anywhere else yet either, that means whatever they want, is here, in this sector."

Takerra hadn't looked at me at all while she studied the map.
"Considering all there is in this sector, there is one target missing

on this list."

This time, the Andorian did turn towards me. I noticed a hint of disbelief in her gaze, as if she couldn't believe that I hadn't thought of some of the things she had been explaining to me. And, she apparently had one more thing to say. "That missing target, is us."

I wasn't sure whether I wanted to believe her or not. "Alright then. Now what?"

Takerra didn't immediately answer me.

"I have a few ideas. But I will need to confer with the rest of tactical and security, and if Denam can miss Kenahov for a couple of days..."

I was sure that could be arranged and stated such.

"When we do encounter the Mirror Universe...things will get interesting." Takerra concluded before she left the bridge. I looked around the bridge myself, and wonderedâ€|. .

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Our departure from Defera was a rather speedy one. We ran away from a world that we had not yet come across in imperial space only because I made one mistake in the dealings with their chief diplomatic representative. But then, it was a mistake that was intentional. I wanted to attract attention, for a very good reason.

I could only hope I wouldn't bring down half the of the opposing star fleet onto our heads in the process.

Sil, the head of my special ops team entered my ready room not half a minute later. He came to attention picture perfect and saluted.
"Mission successful, admiral. The cyberwarfare team found it."

The big and muscular Trill male stepped up to the desk and handed me a padd. I skimmed through it, looking for that one little particular detail. When I found it, Sil would surely notice that I would be smiling like a predator.

"She's here! she's in the sector with her ship!" I nearly shouted it. Sil said nothing. He just stood at attention, waiting for orders. Myself, I could barely contain my excitement and looked further. The stopovers, resupply points and needed evasive coordinates. It was all there, and it made the list for a cat and mouse game more then complete.

"Orders, sir?" I had briefly forgotten Sil was still in the ready room.

"For the moment, nothing. Keep to your scheduled drills and you may want to include boarding into that. Now get out of here."

In mere moments the big trill was gone, leaving me to my

thoughts.

The orders the Cyberwarfare team had extracted out of the Deferi database had been pretty clear and yet so diplomatically vague worded as to leave me retching. Why for once could counterparts simply not park a couple of starships somewhere without resorting to...games to clear up problems in sectors? Still, considering their success in this manner of working, and the size of their own empire they had to have done something right somewhere, just like we had. Still, we were out here for another reason all together.

I tapped my own combadge "This is the admiral. Senior officers to conference room 2 in 45 minutes." I had someone else to see before that.

The elevator let me out at deck 3 not much later. I was just in time to see the ships doctor leave the quarters that were my destination on the deck. I saw her eyes, and the sadness they contained.

"Doctor?"

"Admiral...he has about a week left." The message hit me like a Mek'l leth. "I might be able to prolong it but in the end he will only suffer more."

I sighed "Thank you doctor. Keep me apprised of the situation." I entered the quarters without chiming. He would know I was coming, just as I had promised.

He was sitting on a recliner, reading an ancient book and seemingly unaware of my presence. His body looked rather frail, his hair or what was left of it was a shade of silver that made him appear dignified enough to be a former leader of a nation. His brown eyes still had that curious look upon them, but a lot of the light that had one time been there had gone. A bottle of what I assumed to be synthehol and a nearly empty glass standing on the table nearby. He slowly and gently turned the page. "I take it there is news?" he then asked without looking up.

"That little op at Defera was successful. Her ship is in the sector and has orders to patrol a number of systems here." He gently put the book down on the table. "So now the plan is to find her and follow her until the opportunity for a meeting presents itself."

"And then what?"

I could give no answer.

"Sit with me." Obediently I walked over to the recliner and sat down beside the man. A brief glance in my direction, and a smile followed. "You remind me of your mother, you seem to have her eyes."

A small chuckle escaped my lips "From what you told me of her, I sometimes think I inherited some of her passions instead of her looks." I got a small smile as reward.

"I suppose you have, Evris." He drew me close. "That it has taken me all those years..." I could almost feel the regret in this man's voice. "I should have taken more time." For a brief moment I thought I noticed a tear forming in the mans eye. It seemed somewhat uncharacteristic of him.

"You had bigger things to contend with." It was a little to matter of fact to my liking, but it was the truth. It was the one thing that he had always inspired into me. 'You've always told me that duty comes first."

"Ah, but it does." he paused as a brief contraction of pain suddenly emanated across his features. "I take it you saw the doctor when she went out?"

I sighed and nodded rather reluctantly. "I did, and she told me."

"Will it effect your plans?" I briefly shuddered as he stared at me. It was that famous stare that was supposed to make enemies and those of his subordinates that weren't quite up to it yet, cower before him.

"The only thing it will effect is the timetable. If her patrol route hasn't been changed in any way or form, and it might have been, the only thing we'll need is an empty system, as to avoid any kind of interference. And despite any kind of efforts we took when coming here there is still a chance we might have been spotted when we departed the Badlands."

"Do you understand your duty?" I had not expected that question to be asked of me.

"I do. And I will carry it out to the fullest."

"Then go, and leave me. I require rest." It required me to leave without saying goodbye but, I would check up on the old man again after finishing paperwork. Perhaps after he had rest we would be able to talk on a more familiar level. But I doubted it, the sickness had such a hold of him that I even began to doubt he would return to our home universe with us.

Still, I had my orders, and had more than one reason to see this mission through in one piece.

Later that night, USS Huallaga.

To say that I was exhausted would be an understatement. I spent half the day with the tactical department taking part in drills. Drills that mostly consisted of reacting to new situations, fighting ships of the Empire and their crews on the holodeck and a few rather basic drills with slugthrowers, and more than a few bits and pieces of equipment that came with it.

I had a solitary and simple dinner in my quarters and decided on an early night. I was asleep even before my head hit the pillows.

The lightning overhead was like on any starship I had ever been on. Regular patterns and set distances as to illuminate any obstacles and ample room to provide visual aids that would help give a sense of direction. So why were those lights passing above me as if was being carried by someone that was running?

_It was then that I began to hear the footsteps, panting and more importantly, nearly all the other sounds of a ship that was on Red

Alert but in serious trouble. For a brief moment I thought I heard phasers being discharged in the distance, but that sound was soon replaced by people panting. From the edge of my at times rather blurred vision I noticed someone standing next to me, and leaning somewhat in my direction. It was a male._

I could see his face was haggard as well from the effort and that he appeared to have suffered some sort injury but from what I couldn't tell. I then noticed his lips beginning to move.

"_We're almost to the shuttle. Can you hold on for just a bit longer?"_

A second voice, this one a female, answered while gasping for breath. "I can. Lead on."

Again there were footsteps as two people were running for their lives or so I assumed again. They stumbled at least twice as the ship shook rather violently due to what I assumed again was weapons fire. From my point of view I was exchanged hands a couple of times before the duo reached a shuttle bay that reminded me of the one on a Galaxy class starship. There was one runabout in the bay, and the male immediately went for it.

The woman hesitated. "Isn't that the..prototype?"

"_Do you see anything else?"_

No reply came, and I was carried in via the main hatch.

I felt the engines start up and launch of the runabout more then I saw it. But since I seemed to be carried, I supposed that was to be expected. I also felt that the Runabout wasn't quite flown as usual. There seemed to be no steady hand at the controls. I could almost feel the jerky maneuvers, as if the pilot had no recent experience in flying runabout type vessels.

"_Keep an eye on that screen over there. Just warn me if anything gets to close." The male spoke, his voice having a rather harried edge to it. The jerky movements, which I now took for a semblance of evasive action, continued, until an incoming transmission filled the air_

"_Runabout Octavian, halt your flight and prepare to be boarded." Again, I could see nothing, but the tone of the voice directing the two occupants to halt the vessel indicated to me that things would definitely not go well if those two complied with that order.

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Apparently the male voice agreed with me. "That 'll be the day!" I heard a series of rapid keystrokes commencing. And not much later the female voice piped in again.

"_What are you doing?" I could hear a hint of panic in her voice._

"_Do you really want to be boarded?" A hint of desperation was now also audible in the male's voice. The female voice indicated that she did not want that to happen. The keystrokes resumed again, as the runabout was rattled by a weapons hit._

The transmission was repeated again and this time the intend was clear. The occupants of the Octavian needed to stop their craft. But, they had no intention of doing so, that much was clear. Even to me, an observer that was present in one form or another.

The keystroke rhythm that had been audible for a little while now stopped.

_The female voice spoke again, sounding even more panicky now. "What are you doing?" _

"_This is the only out that I can see." And with that I heard one more keystroke, followed by a humming sound that reminded me of a device that was powering up. "I'm sorry I got you into this." the male concluded as something that looked like a transporter effect but was different in a way I did not recognize overtook the entire interior._

It seemed like an eternity until something happened again.

We rematerialized in space, adrift, and with the interior a total mess. From my vantage point I could see two shapes slumped over the controls up front, where a couple of lights indicating failures of some sort were pulsating their steady warnings.

I was stunned to see the familiar sights and sounds of a regular Federation transporter fill my vantage point. Three Starfleet officers materialized, and immediately two of them rushed forward to the controls. The other one, a lieutenant that was wearing a late 2370ish era uniform that identified her as either an engineering or an operations specialist came towards me.

I frowned as I noticed her shape evolve into a female one as she bend down towards me. "There's a baby here!" my frown turned into something else entirely as I recognized the voice. It was my mother!

But that was impossible!

Then I heard a voice come through a combadge "Away team, prepare for emergency beam out!" This time I did feel the transporter effect wash over me.

The rest of what happened was lost as the intercom woke me. "Doctor Ozloe to Admiral Torvann. Are you alright?"

I groaned. It looked as if I was going to have to talk with the doctor or one of the counselors. I wasn't looking forward to it, at all.

End
file.